



## **Revised Publishers' Criteria for the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Literacy, Grades K–2**

*David Coleman • Susan Pimentel*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Developed by two of the lead authors of the Common Core State Standards and revised through conversations with teachers, researchers and others, these criteria are designed to guide publishers and curriculum developers as they work to strengthen existing programs and ensure alignment of materials with the Standards. The standards are the product of a state-led effort coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers and were developed in collaboration with states, teachers, school administrators, and content experts.

The criteria articulated below concentrate on the most significant elements of the Common Core State Standards for literacy in kindergarten through 2nd grade and lay out their implications for aligning materials with the standards. They are intended to guide teachers, curriculum developers and publishers to be purposeful and strategic in both what to include and what to exclude in instructional materials. By underscoring what matters most in the standards, the criteria illustrate what shifts must take place in the next generation of curricula, including paring away elements that distract or are at odds with the Common Core State Standards, and refining components to be consistent with research-based practices. These guidelines are not meant to dictate classroom practice but rather to help ensure that teachers receive and rely on effective tools. At the heart of these criteria is the belief that reading — in this case, learning to read, vocabulary development and the knowledge gained in these early years — is central to all other academic learning.

In the early grades, this includes thorough attention to the foundations of reading. While the goal for readers of all ages is to be able to understand and learn from what they read and to express such knowledge clearly through speaking and writing about text, primary grade instruction in the foundations is essential to ensure that reading problems are prevented and that most students will read well enough to benefit from grade level instruction. While these criteria begin with the foundational skills, they are not an end in and of themselves; rather, they are necessary and important components of an effective, comprehensive reading program designed to develop proficient readers with the capacity to comprehend texts across a range of types and disciplines.

In kindergarten–grade 2, the most notable shifts in the standards when compared to state standards include explicit preparation to read informational text and an explicit requirement that students' reading material be substantive and linked in meaningful ways to content area learning. They also include a more in-depth approach to vocabulary development and a requirement that students

encounter sufficiently complex text through listening even while they are learning how to read and write. The standards provide a coherent approach to reading comprehension in the early years built on anchor standards that extend into three through twelfth grade learning. Finally, the standards cultivate a wide range of writing including narrative expression of experiences real and imagined as well as sharing information and opinions.

## **DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION**

This document has three parts: The first articulates criteria that should guide the teaching of reading foundations, the second details the criteria that should guide the selection of texts for read-alouds and for students who already can read, and the third outlines criteria for the development of high-quality, fully integrated materials that provide linear, cumulative skill progressions and practice with text-dependent questions and tasks, leading to fluent, independent reading for meaning.

- I. Key Criteria for Reading Foundations**
- II. Key Criteria for Text Selections**
- III. Key Criteria for Questions and Tasks**

## I. Key Criteria for Reading Foundations

The Common Core State Standards offer specific guidance on reading foundations that should be incorporated into curriculum materials so that students will be well on their way to decoding automatically and reading with fluency by the time they finish 2nd grade. While progress in fluency with more complex text should continue through third grade and beyond, and gains in understanding of language structure should continue through the elementary grades, the first three years of instruction (K-2) are the most critical for preventing students from falling behind and preventing reading failure. The standards articulate a well-developed set of skills and habits that taken collectively lay the foundation for students to achieve competence in reading comprehension. (See pp. 14–16 of the Common Core State Standards for more detail.)

Materials aligned with the Common Core State Standards need to provide sequential, cumulative, instruction and practice opportunities for the full range of foundational skills. The elements should be gradually interwoven, from simple to complex, so that students come to understand and use the system of correspondences that characterize written English. The code systems on which reading and writing depend include letters, the speech sounds of spoken language (phonemes), the correspondences between phonemes and graphemes (phonics) and the representation of meaningful word parts (morphemes). Automatic and accurate word recognition is the expected outcome of this instruction. By learning to decipher word forms students will be able to access word meanings in print, and make the shift to independent, close reading of complex text.

1. ***Materials allow for flexibility in meeting the needs of a wide range of students.*** Students come to school unevenly prepared. While the primary purpose of a beginning reading instruction program is to ensure that all students learn how to read, some students will move ahead quickly and should be able to move on once they have demonstrated mastery of the basic content. Additionally, adjustments should be made to programs now in use to refine content and methodology that will likely “catch” more of those students who otherwise would fall behind and require remedial work. Details about what explicitly should be taught is outlined in the Foundational Reading Standards and further explicated in Appendix A of the standards, including but not limited to the explicit teaching of the speech sounds of English orthography, instruction in the nature of the speech sound system (what is a vowel; what is a consonant; how is a consonant different from a vowel), and instruction in letter formation as well as letter naming and alphabetic order.

2. ***Materials include effective instruction for all aspects of foundational reading (including distributed practice).*** Materials that are aligned to the standards should provide explicit and systematic instruction and diagnostic support in concepts of print, phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, syntax, and fluency. These foundational skills are necessary and central components of an effective, comprehensive reading program designed to develop proficient readers with the capacity to comprehend texts across a range of types and disciplines.

Materials should provide ample opportunities for students to understand and fully learn the spelling/sound patterns necessary — though not sufficient — to become successful readers. This goal is accomplished when students can transfer knowledge of these patterns to words not previously seen or studied. Because students differ widely in how much exposure and practice they need to master foundational skills, materials also need to incorporate high-quality activities for those students who are able to reach facility with less practice. Those students who need less practice can enjoy activities such as extension assignments and especially more independent reading.

3. ***Fluency is a particular focus of instructional materials.*** Fluency in the early grades is a function of automaticity in basic skills in speech sound, letter, word, and phrase recognition, as well as knowledge of the meanings of the words that are being read. Materials should include routines and guidance that will remind teachers to monitor the consolidation of skills as students are learning them. Consolidation is usually accomplished through systematic and cumulative instruction, sufficient practice to achieve accuracy, and a variety of specific fluency-building techniques supported by research. These include monitored partner reading; choral reading; repeated readings with text, and short, timed practice that is slightly challenging to the reader; and involving the student in monitoring progress toward a specific fluency goal.

Teacher support for fluency instruction should explicitly recognize that reading rates vary with the type of text being read and the purpose for reading. For example, comprehension of texts that are of greater informational density or complexity generally requires slower reading. Therefore, if fluency is being monitored to identify those students who need more work in this area, passages that have been standardized through research should be used to assess students' fluency.

4. ***Materials focus on academic vocabulary prevalent in complex texts throughout reading, writing, listening, and speaking instruction.*** When they enter school, students differ markedly in their vocabulary knowledge. The entire curriculum should address this vocabulary gap early and systematically or it will expand and accelerate. All materials should provide opportunities for wider ranging and more intensive vocabulary instruction for students with weaker vocabularies than their peers.

Instruction in science, social studies, and the arts will be a major vehicle for enhancing students' vocabulary because most new word learning takes place in the context of having to understand and express ideas about subject matter. Students should receive frequent instruction in word meanings and practice with a variety of vocabulary-building activities. For example, they should learn to examine the context of how the words are being used in the text, consider multiple meanings of common words, examine shades of meaning of words that overlap semantically, and choose words carefully to express ideas. As they learn to read meaningful word parts, such as verb markers and comparative endings, the relationship between word form and word meaning should also be addressed. For English language learners, explicitly highlighting and linking cognates of key words with other languages can be very useful. Materials should use games, jokes, puns, and other forms of word play to enhance instruction and develop a sense of excitement about words.

Some students, including some English language learners, will also need support in mastering the meaning of high-frequency words that are essential to reading grade-level text. Supplemental resources will be necessary for supporting students who are developing knowledge of these words. Since teachers will often not have the time to teach explicitly all of the high-frequency words required, materials should make it possible for students to learn the words' meanings on their own, providing such things as student-friendly definitions for high-frequency words whose meanings cannot be inferred from the context.

5. ***Materials offer assessment opportunities that measure progress in the foundations of reading.*** Activities used for assessment should clearly denote what standards are being emphasized, and materials should offer frequent and easily implemented assessments, including systems for record keeping and follow-up. These should include a framework and tools for standardized by research in relation to established predictive benchmarks when fluency is being measured. Vocabulary development as well should be assessed using the most reliable and valid methods currently available.

## II. Key Criteria for Text Selections

The CCSS strongly point to the necessity for teaching students how to read with texts that are written to facilitate accurate, independent, confident reading, and the consolidation of basic reading skill in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Students who can read are much more likely to read.

The Common Core State Standards point strongly toward the integration of text reading skills with language comprehension instruction, even for those students who lag behind in achieving reading facility. That said, students should be guided into thoughtful reading of even the simplest texts used with beginning readers. To that end, all texts should contain some meaningful information or narrative content with which to develop students' comprehension. The criteria recommended below emphasize the need to provide *all* students with consistent opportunities to confront and comprehend grade-level text.

In addition to students learning to read texts at the K-2 level of complexity, the standards encourage students to encounter more complex texts to build knowledge through read-alouds. Students early knowledge in areas like history and science should not be limited to what they can read on their own. Because students at these grades can listen to much more complex material than they can read themselves, read-aloud selections should be provided to the teachers in curriculum materials. These should be at levels of complexity well above what students can read on their own.

1. ***Texts for each grade align with the requirements outlined in the standards.*** The Common Core State Standards hinge on students encountering appropriate texts at each grade level to develop the mature language skills and the conceptual knowledge they need for success in school and life. Beginning in grade 2, Reading Standard 10 outlines the band level of text complexity at which students need to demonstrate comprehension. (Appendix A in the Common Core State Standards gives further information on how text complexity can be measured and offers guidance to teachers and curriculum developers on selecting the texts their students read.)<sup>1</sup>

Far too often, students who have fallen behind are given only less complex texts rather than the instruction they need in the foundational skills in reading as well as vocabulary and other supports they need to read at an appropriate level of complexity. Complex text, whether accessed through individual reading or as a group reading activity, is a rich repository to which all readers need access. Complex text contains more sophisticated academic vocabulary, lends itself to more complex tasks, and is able to support rich dialogue.

Instruction for slower readers is most effective when it addresses all of the critical reading components in an integrated and coordinated manner. Students who need additional assistance, however, must not miss out on essential instruction their classmates are receiving to help them think deeply about texts, participate in thoughtful discussions, and gain world and word knowledge.

2. ***Text selections are worth reading and re-reading.*** The standards maintain that high-quality text selections should be consistently offered to students because they will encourage students and teachers to dig more deeply into their meanings than they would with lower quality material. Texts selected for inclusion should be well written and, as appropriate, richly illustrated. This principle applies equally to texts intended for reading aloud and texts for students to read by

<sup>1</sup> A working group has developed clear, common standards for measuring text complexity that are consistent across different curricula and publishers. These measures blend quantitative and qualitative factors and are being widely shared and made available to publishers and curriculum developers. The measurement of some narrative fiction as well as poetry and drama for the time being likely will have to depend largely on qualitative judgments that are based on the principles laid out in Appendix A and have been further developed and refined. These criteria recognize the critical role that teachers play in text selection.

themselves. (For samples of appropriate quality of selection, see Appendix B of the Common Core State Standards.)

- 3. Literacy programs shift the balance of texts and instructional time to include equal measures of literary and informational text.** The standards call for elementary curriculum materials to be recalibrated to reflect a mix of 50 percent literary and 50 percent informational text, including reading in ELA, science, social studies, and the arts. Achieving the appropriate balance between literary and informational text in the next generation of materials requires a significant shift in early literacy materials and instructional time so that scientific and historical text are given the same time and weight as literary text. (See p. 31 of the standards for details on how literature and informational texts are defined.) In the last few years, informational texts that are rich and accessible to even first and second grades are available although many more such texts are needed. Because students at these grades can listen to much more complex material than they can read themselves, read-aloud selections should be provided for the teachers in the curriculum materials. These should be at levels of complexity well above what students can read on their own. Science and social studies in particular should be taught in such a way that students have access to the concepts and vocabulary through read-alouds beyond what they can read on their own.

To develop reading comprehension and vocabulary for *all* readers, the selected informational texts need to build a coherent body of knowledge within and across grades. (The sample series of texts regarding “The Human Body” provided on p. 33 of the Common Core State Standards offers an example of selecting texts to build knowledge coherently within and across grades. They include both grade level texts and read aloud texts that illustrate the quality and complexity of student reading in the standards.)

- 4. Additional materials aim to increase the regular independent reading of texts that appeal to students’ interests while developing both their knowledge base and joy in reading.** These materials should ensure that all students have daily opportunities to read texts of their choice on their own during and outside of the school day. Students need access to a wide range of materials on a variety of topics and genres both in their classrooms and in their school libraries to ensure that they have opportunities to independently read broadly and widely to build their knowledge, experience, and joy in reading. Materials will need to include texts at students’ own reading level as well as texts with complexity levels that will challenge and motivate students. Texts should also vary in length and density, requiring students to slow down or read more quickly depending on their purpose for reading. In alignment with the standards and to acknowledge the range of students’ interests, these materials should include informational texts as well as literature.

### III. Key Criteria for Questions and Tasks

Materials offered in support of reading comprehension should assist teachers and students in staying focused on the primary goal of instruction in these early years: developing proficient and fluent readers able to learn independently from a wide variety of rich texts. The aim is for students to understand that thinking and reading occur simultaneously. Curricula should focus classroom time on practicing reading, writing, speaking, and listening with high-quality text and text-dependent questions and omit that which would otherwise distract from achieving those goals.

- 1. Questions and tasks cultivate students’ abilities to ask and answer questions based on the text.** Materials that accompany texts should ask students to think about what they have read or heard and then ask them to draw evidence from the text in support of their ideas about the

reading. The standards strongly focus on students gathering evidence and knowledge from what they read and therefore require that a majority of questions and tasks that children ask and respond to be text-dependent—questions that are based on the text under consideration. (This is equally true for read-alouds students listen to as for material students read for themselves.)

Student background knowledge and experiences can illuminate the reading but should not replace attention to the text itself. Questions and tasks should require thinking about the text carefully and finding evidence in the text itself to support the response. Discussion tasks, activities, questions, and writings following readings should draw on a full range of insights and knowledge contained in the text in terms of both content and language. Instructional support materials should focus on posing questions and writing tasks that help students become interested in the text and cultivate student mastery of the specific details and ideas of the text.

2. ***Materials provide opportunities for students to build knowledge through close reading of specific texts (including read alouds).*** Materials should design opportunities for careful reading of selected passages or texts and create a series of questions that demonstrate how close attention to those readings allows students to gather evidence and build knowledge. This approach can and should encourage the comparison and synthesis of multiple sources. Once each source is read or listened to and understood carefully, attention should be given to integrating what students have just read with what they have read and learned previously: How does what they have just read compare to what they have learned before? Drawing upon relevant prior knowledge, how does the text expand or challenge that knowledge?
3. ***Scaffolds and stimulant questions enable all students to experience rather than avoid the complexity of the text.*** Many students will need careful instruction — including effective scaffolding — to enable them to read at the level required by the Common Core State Standards. However, the scaffolding should not preempt or replace the text by translating its contents for students or telling students what they are going to learn in advance of reading or listening to the text; that is, the scaffolding should not become an alternate, simpler source of information that diminishes the need for students to read or listen to the text itself carefully. Students' initial exposure to a text should often engage them directly with the text so they can practice independent reading. Students should be asked to glean the information they need from multiple readings of a text, each with a specific purpose. In particular, aligned curriculum should explicitly direct students to re-read challenging portions of the text and teachers to return to these portions in read alouds. Follow-up support should guide readers in the use of appropriate strategies and habits when encountering places in the text where they might struggle, including scaffolding the application of decoding strategies, and pointing students back to the text with teacher support when they are confused or run into vocabulary or other problems.

When necessary, extra textual scaffolding prior to and during the first read should focus on words and concepts that are essential to a basic understanding and that students are not likely to know or be able to determine from context. Supports should be designed to serve a wide range of readers, including those English language learners and other students who are especially challenged by the complex text before them. Texts and the discussion questions should be selected and ordered so that they bootstrap onto each other and promote deep thinking and substantive engagement with the text. Care should also be taken that introducing broad themes and questions in advance of reading does not prompt overly general conversations rather than focusing reading on the specifics, drawing evidence from the text, and gleaning meaning from it. In short, activities related to the text should be such that the text

itself is the focus of the instruction and children are able to appreciate and get a sense of the selection as a whole.

4. ***Reading strategies support comprehension of specific texts and the focus on building knowledge.*** Close reading and gathering knowledge from specific texts should be at the heart of classroom activities and not be consigned to the margins when completing assignments. Reading strategies should work *in service* of reading comprehension and assist students in building knowledge from texts. To be effective, however, strategies should be introduced and exercised when they help clarify a specific part of a text and are dictated by specific features of a text and especially to assist with understanding more challenging sections. They should not be disconnected from the text nor seen as ends in themselves. Over time, and through supportive discussion, interaction, and reflection, students need to build an infrastructure of skills, habits, knowledge, dispositions, and experience that enables them to approach new challenging texts with confidence and stamina.
5. ***Reading passages are by design centrally located within materials.*** The reading passages in either the teachers' guides or the students' editions of curriculum materials should be easily found and put at the center of the layout so that teachers—who are in the best position—can select the specific texts. The text should be the clear focus of student and teacher attention. Surrounding materials should be thoughtfully considered and justified as essential before being included. That is, the text should be central, and surrounding materials should be included only when necessary, so as not to distract from the text itself.
6. ***Materials offer assessment opportunities that genuinely measure progress.*** Aligned materials should guide teachers to provide scaffolding and support to students but also gradually remove those supports by including tasks that require students to demonstrate their independent capacity to read and write in every domain at the appropriate level of complexity and sophistication. Activities used for assessment should clearly denote what standards are being emphasized, and materials should offer frequent and easily implemented assessments, including systems for record keeping and follow-up.
7. ***Writing opportunities for students are prominent and varied.*** The standards call for writing both as a means of communicating thinking and answering questions and as a means of self-expression and exploration. Writing assignments should be varied and ask students to draw on their experience, on their imagination, and most frequently on the texts they encounter through reading or read-alouds. As a means to such expressions, the standards require students in the early grades to know their letters, phonetic conventions, sentence structures, spelling and the like. Acquiring these basic skills and tools along with regular opportunities to express themselves will enable students to engage in a full range of writing, including writing narratives (both real and imagined), writing to inform, and writing opinions.

## **CONCLUSION: TRANSPARENT RESEARCH AND PRACTICE BASE**

Curriculum offered as an excellent match for the Common Core State Standards should produce evidence of its usability and efficacy with a full range of students, including English language learners. In all materials, principles of reading acquisition are explained, instructions to teachers and students are clear and concise, and the relationship between tasks and the expected learning outcome is clear and placed in close proximity to the task directions.

Curriculum materials must also have a clear and documented research base. Programs that already have a research base should build on that base by continuing to monitor their efficacy with the whole range of Common Core standards.